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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR AF, AF/SPG, D, DRL, INR, PRM

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [SU](#) [NI](#) [DARFUR](#)

SUBJECT: DARFUR PEACE TALKS: "FINAL, DECISIVE ROUND" OPENS

11. (SBU) Summary. The seventh round of the Inter-Sudanese Peace Talks on the conflict in Darfur opened on November 29 with all speakers emphasizing the importance of reaching a comprehensive agreement in this round. SLM leaders avoided an early setback by compromising on a single speaker for the opening ceremony, naming a joint negotiating team, and selecting a chief negotiator. A more-unified JEM continues to assume a disproportionate role because of SLM's divisions and is working to minimize the effect of SLM's leadership problems on a common negotiating strategy. The Government of Sudan asserts its commitment to reaching a comprehensive agreement can be reached by the end of the year. End Summary.

12. (U) African Union Special Envoy Salim Salim and Nigerian Foreign Minister Olu Adeniji opened the seventh round of negotiations on Darfur in Abuja on November 29. Salim, Adeniji, and other opening speakers, which included the Chad Mediation, Government of Sudan, one speaker for the Sudan Liberation Movement and Justice and Equality Movement, Libya, United Nations, international community, and the Arab League, emphasized that this round of talks must be the final round and continue until a comprehensive agreement on power-sharing, wealth-sharing, and security arrangements is reached. Adeniji relayed Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's message that the parties must reach an agreement this round as he did not wish to or intend to invite the parties back to Abuja for an eighth round. Ambassador Pekka Haavisto, the European Union's Special Envoy, delivered remarks on behalf of the international community. Most of the speakers recognized the SLM reconciliation efforts carried out by Deputy Secretary Zoellick and A/S Frazer at Nairobi and El Fasher as well as the follow-on efforts of Chad, Eritrea, and Libya.

13. (SBU) The opening ceremony speeches were largely unexceptional in content except for the rebel movements' rejection of the Government of Sudan's plan to hold an "all inclusive conference". In delivering the opening remarks on behalf of both movements, Justice and Equality Movement's Ahmed Lissan Tugod stated clearly that the conference cannot be a substitute for the ongoing Darfur talks.

14. (SBU) The rebel movements were able to overcome significant disagreement within SLM and present a unified, public front for the ceremony. The compromise selection of JEM's Tugod to speak on behalf of both rebel movements came as the result of two days of discussion and was reached only an hour prior to the meeting. The Eritreans, Chadians, and Libyans and members of the international community moved between the SLM factions represented by Abdelwahid Nur and Mini Minawi, and to a lesser extent, JEM, to convince the movements to decide on a single speaker. Initially, Mini Minawi insisted that SLM, which controls more territory in Darfur, should speak and that as the newly elected President, he would deliver the remarks. Abdelwahid and his followers, of course, rejected this idea and supported the option of allowing JEM to speak rather than either Mini or Abdelwahid. Mini agreed to this after insisting that he be able to name the chief negotiator, Abduljabar Dosa. Abdelwahid was not entirely happy with this development, but concurred.

15. (U) The Government of Sudan's delegation made its appearance only minutes before the opening. The delegation included four members of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM): Minister of State for Industry Thomas Tootshok, southern parliamentary leader Yasser Armand, Sudan Council of Churches leader Baba Clement, and SPLM economic advisor Louk, who will work on wealth-sharing issues.

16. (U) Salim's workplan for the negotiations includes running two track negotiating sessions concurrently, starting with power-sharing on November 30. The power-sharing session will begin with "Article 4" of the agenda adopted during the sixth round in Abuja which looks at the federal system and other levels of governance. Initial consultations on security arrangements led by Nigerian General Joe Garba will also begin this week. Salim had hoped to start with wealth-sharing negotiations but the resource persons and experts will not arrive until next

week. Many had hoped for three concurrent sessions, but the facilities at the Chida Hotel can only accommodate two at a time. It will be difficult for the rebel movements to handle two simultaneous sessions as it is.

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COMMENT
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17. (SBU) The seventh round opened without any major controversies. The SLM, although still divided, is saying all the right things about a joint negotiating position. Both Abdelwahid and Mini have promised not to bring their leadership issues to the table. So far, we appear to be off to a good start on that score although there are continuing rumblings of SLM internal armed conflict on the ground in Darfur.

FUREY